

Story 1773 (1994 Tape 4)

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The Noble and the Ignoble Friends

There were two friends who set out together to seek their fortunes. One was Mert and the other was Gıgırt.<sup>1</sup> Each had a good bag of provisions as they set out, and the trip began under pleasant circumstances. They had walked quite a way by noon of that day, and then they stopped to eat. They took food for their lunch from Mert's pack. When evening came, they again ate from Mert's supply of food. Morning, noon, and evening of the following day they continued to eat Mert's food. Shortly after they set out on the following morning, they came to a crossroad. By then Mert's food had all been eaten, and so Mert said to Gıgırt, "Let us now have some food from your pack."

"No," said Gıgırt.

"Friend, we have already eaten all the food from my pack. Now we should eat from your pack. That is the way

<sup>1</sup>Mert is an epithet which means of noble character; Gıgırt is one which means of ignoble character. The two Turkish terms are used as names throughout the tale, and it is simpler here to use the Turkish words than to use their translations into English.

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friendship works, my friend."

"No," said Gıgırt again.

"If that is your response, then let us part company here," said Mert.

"All right."

"I shall follow the lower path, on the right, you can take the other one."

"No!" said Gıgırt. "There must be something there that you want."

"Very well," said Mert. "Then I shall take the upper path, to the left."

"No," said Gıgırt. "You seem too ready to go way, and so there must be some advantage in it."

"All right, then," said Mert. "You choose the path you want, and I shall take the other."

"No," said Gıgırt again. "You choose the path that you want, and I shall take the other."

Mert then said, "I am going to take the path to the right. You may go in any direction you wish, except that you must not follow me."

Mert took the path that led to the right, and Gıgırt followed the one that led left. Supported by the food

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in his pack, Gıgirt was able to walk two days longer, when he arrived at a city. There he got a job carrying bricks and stone, and from this work he earned a small amount of money. When he became tired of this work, he returned home the way he had come.

Let us see now what Mert did. He walked as far as he could in his state of hunger. He took shelter in a deserted flour mill, but he had not eaten in so long that his mouth stank from hunger.<sup>2</sup> He thought, "I shall sleep here until morning, and by dawn Allah may provide for me

He had slept for just a short while when the door of the mill opened with a squeaky sound, and a bear entered the mill. Mert was so frightened that he lay even lower in his hiding place and fell asleep again. He was soon awakened for a second time by the squeaky sound of the door, and he saw a wolf enter. Afraid to move, he fell asleep again. Finally, a fox opened the squeaking door and entered. The bear had brought a slaughtered sheep; the wolf had brought another; and the fox had brought a slaughtered chicken. They said, "Let us now eat and fill

<sup>2</sup>In Turkey people who have bad breath as a result of hunger are said to have a rusty stomach.

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our bellies. Whatever happens after that is in the hands of Allah." After they had eaten all the food that they had brought to the mill, one of them said, "Let us now tell stories to entertain each other."

The bear said, "I know of a wealthy ağa<sup>3</sup> who has a very sick daughter. She has some kind of lung disease, and the doctors have not been able to find any cure for her illness. But on the slope of the mountain nearest to us there is a flock of sheep grazing. In that flock there is one black ram. If a piece of the liver of that black ram were to be eaten by that girl, she would be cured almost immediately."

The wolf then said, "On the side of that same mountain there is a bucket of gold buried beneath a lone

<sup>3</sup>An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

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acanthus bush. If one follows such and such a path, he will see that bush. He can easily dig out the gold beneath it."

The fox then said, "On that same mountain there is a large snake who has a great hoard of gold in its lair beneath the ground. Every morning it carries from its lair a large amount of that gold and spreads it out in the sunlight to air it.<sup>4</sup> Then in the evening it carries it all back into its lair. If one goes there during the daylight hours, one could simply pick up much of the gold lying on the grass."

After talking in this way, the bear, the wolf, and the fox left the mill. Mert had listened very carefully to everything that they had said. When morning arrived, he went to the places where they had said gold could be easily

<sup>4</sup>The aerating of buried treasure is a motif of Turkish treasure-hunting lore. The most valuable of all the imagined buried treasures in Turkey is called "Takyonoz gold." (Takyonoz was allegedly a Byzantine emperor, though history does not reveal one so named.) Reported some natural force drives this buried gold upward to be aerated; it then rains back down on the earth and disappears. See Ahmet Uysal's "Turkish Treasure Lore: Traditions and Practices," Int'l Folklore R, iii (1983), 139. It is not known whether or not this belief is somehow related to the classical "shower of gold."

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gotten. He then went to the flock of sheep which was grazing on the side of that mountain. When he saw the black ram he was seeking, he said to the shepherd, "How much do you want for that black ram?"

"No, I cannot sell it to you," said the shepherd

"I'll give you your weight in gold for that ram," said Mert.

"I shall accept only two gold coins for it, not my weight in gold," answered the shepherd

After giving the shepherd two gold coins, Mert took the ram and slaughtered it. He cut out its liver and placed it in a piece of oilcloth. He then went to the palace of the padishah,<sup>5</sup> whose daughter had a disease that prevented her from speaking. Mert asked the padishah, "My padishah, what will you give me if I can make your daughter speak?"

"We shall give you a bag of gold,

"All right! I shall do it for that," said Mert

"But I must be left alone with the girl while I am curing her."

<sup>5</sup>Because mute girls in Turkish folktales are usually princesses, the narrator apparently decided here to upgrade her father from ağa to padishah.

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The padishah objected to this arrangement, for he did not know whether to trust this young stranger. "I want this old, blind servant woman to remain with my daughter," he said.

Mert accepted this arrangement. When all of the others except the old woman had left, Mert gave the mute a piece of liver to eat. As soon as she had swallowed it, it caused her stomach to ache, and before long she vomited forth a green liquid that looked like frog carpet.<sup>6</sup> She then began to speak like a mockingbird, and one of the first things she said was addressed to Mert: "You are my love!"

"No, you shall remain forever my sister. I made no promise of love."

To her father the girl said, "I wish to marry him." the padishah heard that, he too tried to persuade Mert to marry the girl.

But Mert insisted, "I did what I promised to do, and I should not be held responsible for anything else."

<sup>6</sup>This may be a reference to the intensely green algae on the surface of freshwater ponds at certain times of the year. Frogs often lay their eggs in these nonvascular plants.

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Then the padishah gave him the bag of gold he had agreed to give. He also gave Mert a fine white horse, a new suit of clothes, and a pistol. He looked very elegant as he renewed his journey. He went little, he went far, and at last he arrived at the crossroad where he and his friend had parted. To his great surprise, Cimri<sup>7</sup> also arrived there at just that time. Cimri said, "Oh, how well dressed and wealthy you look!"

"Allah gave me what I have," said Mert.

"If Allah gave so much to you, then may He give the same to me."

"If you really want it, then Allah may indeed give it to you

"I shall ride in the same direction that you did and see whether I can be as fortunate as you."

"Very well! Good-bye," said Mert.

Mert went back to his village, and Cimri pursued the route that Mert had taken earlier. After a while Cimri reached the same deserted mill that Mert had found.

<sup>7</sup>Without any explanation the narrator begins calling Gıgırt by another epithet, Cimri. Cimri (mean-spirited and miserly) is almost a synonym for gıgırt.



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He said to himself, "I shall sleep here tonight, and perhaps I shall become as rich as Mert."<sup>8</sup>

After Cimri had slept for a short while, he was awakened by the squeaking of the door as the bear opened it and entered the mill. When the door opened a second time with a squeaking noise, a wolf entered. Then for a third time it opened with a squeak, and the fox entered. Cimri was so frightened by the appearance of these wild animals that he wet himself

After the animals had eaten the food they had brought with them, the fox jumped up and said, "There is something that we should talk about. Yesterday when we were here, we told each other some of our secrets about some very valuable things in this area. Now all those valuable things have disappeared. There must have been some human being here who overheard us."

"No, I think not," said the bear.

"Well, I seem to smell the scent of a human being here right now," said the wolf. "Let us search this mill

<sup>8</sup>In this tale type the successful friend (brother, sister) usually tells his unworthy counterpart how he gained his great success. The narrator has omitted that explanation in this tale, but Cimri seems to know anyway

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and discover whether there is any human being here." When they searched, they found Cimri asleep near the drainage pipe through which water left the mill.

The animals said to Cimri, "Listen to what we have to say. You overheard us talking yesterday, and then afterwards you took both the gold treasures we described as well as the secret medicine to cure the mute girl. What should we do to you?"

Lifting him up, the bear hurled him to the floor, smashing him as if he were a honeycomb. After he had been killed in that way, the wolf tore his body apart. And finally the fox ate both his ears.

Let us now see what Mert is doing. He had a seven-story apartment built

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<sup>9</sup>This seems clearly to be an uncompleted tale. Rarely do tales end so abruptly.